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15 February 1977

COMMENTS ON B TEAM REPORT'S PART ONE DISCUSSION OF
"IMPLICIT NIE ASSUMPTIONS AND JUDGMENTS ABOUT SOVIET
INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR"

In Part One of its report, the B Team asserts that it finds underlying the assessments in the NIEs of the past fifteen years "a whole set of unspoken assumptions about Russian national character and goals that in all essential respects corresponds to the idealized image the United States has of itself but bears very little resemblance to anything that actually relates to Soviet Russia." The B Team attributes these unspoken assumptions, which it says are shared by much of the political, intellectual and business communities in the US, to a uniquely American outlook on the world created by American commercial and democratic traditions and to the long tradition of freedom from strategic threats to US territory.

The broader question of whether the Intelligence Community shares with other key elements in American society a uniquely American outlook on the world, and a failure to recognize that other countries are different, is not an essential element in judging the B Team's charges. We would only note in passing that the Intelligence Community, like the B Team, is largely made up of individuals who have devoted their careers to studying foreign political, economic, and military systems and behavior, notably those of the USSR.

What is pertinent are the questions of how accurately the B Team has depicted the "unspoken assumptions" in the Estimate and whether it is correct in saying that they "bear little resemblance to anything that actually relates to Soviet Russia." In the tabulation below, we list and comment on these "unspoken assumptions."

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-2-Assumptions and JudgmentsAttributed to the NIEs by the B Team .NIO Comments

A. In considering Soviet strategy, the NIEs concentrate on strategic nuclear weapons, ignoring the fact that the Soviets view strategy in Clausewitzian terms as involving all resources applicable in pursuit of national objectives. "By singling out for exclusive treatment the three components of the Triad, [NIE 11-3/8] not only leave out of consideration other nuclear and non-nuclear means but also a whole range of weapons [sic] of a non-military kind which the Soviet leadership sees as available to it in the pursuit of world politics."

B. Though "never spelled out in so many words," the NIE's view of Soviet strategic objectives involves "a rather mechanistic projection onto Soviet society of the sentiments and aspirations of a society which sees war as an unmitigated evil and the military as a social overhead to be curtailed whenever possible, a society which conceives the purpose of organized life to be the steady improvement of the citizen's living standards."

In addition much of US analysis is based on granting "excessive legitimacy to an alleged Russian obsession with national security derived of experience with foreign invasions and interventions."

Contrary to the B Team's impression, the Intelligence Community has always assumed that the Soviets considered strategic nuclear weapons as only one of a number of sources of power and influence at their disposal, albeit an important one. The fact that NIE 11-3/8 is primarily concerned with strategic nuclear weapons rather than with all of Soviet global strategy is a matter of packaging and not concept: the NIE is designed to meet specific policy requirements for a single document on the Soviet strategic attack and defense forces the US would face in event of a strategic nuclear war. If more regular estimative analysis of Soviet "grand strategy" in all its aspects is in order, as may be the case, it would be more appropriately handled in a separate Estimate like NIE 11-4.

We would agree that this quite dubious view of the underlying sentiments, aspirations, and purposes of Soviet society was never spelled out in so many words.

On this point the B Team points out that Russia has not suffered an exceptional number of invasions over its history and that much of what is said about Western interventions in the civil war is pure myth. Granted. We would add, however, that Russia has, along with its own aggression, experienced devastating foreign invasions and that memories of the

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"This basic assumption, strongly (though indirectly) reflected in the NIEs, has a number of corollaries:"

(1) "Soviet military policy is first and foremost defensive in character."
("The possibility that the Soviets may be pursuing not a defensive but an offensive strategy is not entertained in the NIEs.")

(2) "The Soviet Union is primarily interested in securing an effective deterrent force...[and] deterrence is regarded as an end goal and, as in Western thinking, as something fundamentally different from war-fighting capability and strategic superiority."

1941-1945 war have had more psychological effect on the present generation of Russians than the B Team apparently concedes and that the mythical account of Western interventions is the one officially promulgated to the Soviet people. We would not agree that, as the B Team implies, a discussion of the defensive elements in Soviet thinking "legitimizes" them.

The B Team appears to be caught in the framework of one of those "conflicting dichotomies" it enthusiastically condemns in the Summary of its report. As its quotation from NIE 11-4-72 illustrates, the NIEs have usually considered the Soviets as seeking both the "defensive" goals of security and protection for what they already have and leverage for expansion of their power and influence.

We are puzzled by the B Team's citation--as an example of a refusal to consider offensive use of Soviet strategic weapons--of a passage from a 1972 memo (not an NIE) which reports on a major effort to ensure the ability of Soviet nuclear forces to absorb a US strike and still return a devastating blow. Hardening ICBM sites might be useful in protecting those units held back in an offensive first strike. But providing a secure retaliatory capability is an at least equally plausible reason for hardening ICBM sites, particularly in view of the large-scale program involved.

The first part of the statement is essentially correct; the second is a gross misrepresentation of what is said in all but the earliest Estimates, such as the one cited by the B Team as saying, in 1964, that there was no reason to believe that the USSR desired to match the US in numbers of ICBMs.

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NIO Comments

We agree that the Soviets have never accepted the concept of mutual assured destruction, with its connotation that some finite level of force is sufficient for deterrence. We believe they do, however, recognize mutual deterrence as a present reality that will be very difficult to alter.

Thus, we continue to believe, as we have in the past, that securing and preserving a secure deterrent has been a fundamental objective of the Soviet strategic buildup. Since at least 1970, however, the Estimates have also stressed that Soviet military doctrine called for pre-emptive counterforce targeting to reduce the weight of any US attack on the USSR, that the SS-9 was probably so targeted, and that the likely advent of MIRVs and higher ICBM accuracies would add to Soviet counterforce capabilities. They have also devoted considerable attention to the extensive efforts the Soviets have undertaken in recent years to improve the reliability of their weapon systems and the survivability of their weapons, command and control installations, and key governmental and industrial installations and personnel. These improved war-fighting capabilities properly raise the question of whether the Soviets are seriously seeking to gain a first-strike capability. As US advocates of improved civil defense would presumably agree, however, these improved war-fighting capabilities also contribute to deterrence.

("Proceeding from this premise, the NIEs have notoriously underestimated both the intensity and scope of the Soviet commitment to a strategic nuclear buildup.")

With respect to the B Team's comment, the NIEs may have underestimated the intensity and scope of the Soviet commitment but not--at least in the last four years--the intensity and scope of the buildup itself.

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NIO Comments

(3) "Once the Soviet Union has attained parity with the US and...an effective deterrent, it will not wish to continue the arms race...The Soviet Union will turn into a stabilizing force in international affairs and shift an increasing share of its resources from the military to the civilian sector."

This is mainly an exaggerated version of a theme present in the strategic NIEs of the 1968-1972 period to the effect that Soviet interest in SALT could reflect a desire to significantly slow down the arms race. However it was always assumed that some aspects of the competition would continue. Thus, NIE 11-4-72, which the B Team cites in support of its interpretation, says:

The Soviets realize, of course, that what they are contemplating in continuing with serious negotiations in SALT is not a matter of ending strategic competition between the two countries, but rather narrowing its focus. One important area where intense competition will continue no matter what the outcome of the talks is strategic R&D.

On the economic issue, while NIE 11-4-72 does say that the Soviets would "no doubt prefer" to shift some scarce resources to the civilian sector, it adds that "the USSR would not be obliged, for purely economic reasons, to forego military programs its leaders see as essential." The Estimates never extended their discussion of Soviet interest in SALT to assert that the USSR would become "a stabilizing force in international affairs."

(4) "Because its preoccupation is with defense, in its military effort the Soviet Union mainly responds to initiatives of its potential rivals, especially the US. Its strategic moves are reactive in character and opportunistic rather than self-generated or long term in conception,"

This is certainly the kind of impression left by the strategic estimates of the 1960s, which tended to depict the arms competition in simplistic action-reaction terms and overemphasized the problems of catching and keeping up with the US strategic buildup.

The statement does not, however, fairly reflect the outlook of more recent Estimates, especially those of the last

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(5) "Given the obsession with national security and the fact that its military arsenal serves primarily defensive purposes, the US can watch without alarm the Soviet effort to attain military parity. The attainment of such parity will provide the Russians with the sense of confidence necessary for them to decelerate the arms race."

(6) "The Russians would admittedly not be averse to gaining strategic superiority over the US if they thought

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four years. These Estimates, to be sure, have explicitly treated projected improvement in US strategic forces as an important consideration in long-range Soviet force planning; it is inconceivable to us that Soviet planners would ignore how US capabilities were likely to evolve. However, they also have stressed the dynamism and momentum of the Soviet strategic buildup and Soviet interest in forging ahead; from 1973 onward they have depicted the Soviets as going progressively beyond the point of merely trying to keep up with the competition.

With due allowance for some overkill in the B Team's wording, this is a reasonably accurate statement of what the Estimates conveyed from 1968 to 1972, at the time the Soviets were drawing roughly even with the US. They indicated, we think correctly, that the Soviets were intent on achieving at least acknowledged equal status with the US and that there was little likelihood that they would agree to arms limitation or unilaterally decelerate the arms race until they had achieved it. (The Estimates did not go so far as to say that the Soviets would in fact decelerate once they had achieved parity.) These Estimates now appear deficient for not placing greater emphasis on the possibility that the Soviets would wish to continue their buildup even after military parity had apparently been achieved, but we think they were correct in not considering the goal of parity per se as a cause for alarm.

In any event, the issue is historical. From 1973, the Estimates have treated the Soviet strategic buildup as a cause for increasing concern.

With respect to the last sentence, we no longer hold to the view, expressed in most Estimates of the 1960s and that of

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Assumptions and JudgmentsAttributed to the NIEs by the B Team

this goal feasible." But--until very recently--e.g., NIE 11-3/8-75--the NIEs have unaccountably, without any supporting evidence, ruled this out as unattainable and something the Soviets would not seriously think of seeking. "The prevailing tone of the NIE all along has been to view Soviet policy as one of prudent opportunism. The Soviets are seen as unwilling to take high risks or to make any moves that might provoke the US, on whose good will they are believed to place extremely high value."

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1972, that concern about provoking the US would inhibit Soviet strategic weapon programs. Otherwise, this formulation is reasonably accurate and thus serves as a basis for discussing the fundamental difficulty the drafters of the NIEs have had in accepting the B Team's assumption that the Soviets have from the onset been engaged in a serious effort to achieve strategic superiority in the form of a capability to wage and win a nuclear war.

The question of whether the Soviets were seeking strategic superiority in the form of a first-strike capability has received prominent attention in the Intelligence Community ever since the late 1960s. The Soviets were obviously building up their counterforce and war-waging capabilities. Even the most pessimistic projections available indicated, however, that a disabling first strike against US ICBMs would still leave the USSR exposed to heavy attack by US SLBMs and bombers. And, it was generally agreed, the Soviet ABM system and the type of civil defense programs then being conducted gave no real promise of protecting the Soviet Union against massive casualties and economic collapse. Thus even those intelligence agency heads who were most concerned about the Soviet buildup rejected the idea of a first-strike capability and sought to identify ways in which "superiority" in, say, numbers of weapons, might provide at least some political leverage.

This situation has now changed. The Soviets have not only continued to build up their war-fighting capabilities through increased numbers of weapons with counterforce potential and the hardening of weapons, command posts and communications. In addition, they have undertaken a major shelter construction program designed to

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(7) "Soviet military doctrine and the official pronouncements of Soviet leaders which seem to indicate a more aggressive stance, as for example, when they speak of "socialist" (read: Soviet) world hegemony, need not be taken too seriously."

protect key governmental and economic cadres. This still does not mean that the Soviets think they could lightly start a nuclear war. But it does mean that the Soviets are working actively to improve their chances of surviving.

In the case of Soviet military doctrine the opposite is the case. For at least the past six years, the NIEs have emphasized the war-fighting aspects of Soviet military doctrine regarding nuclear war. Thus, from NIE 11-8-71: "There are numerous references over the years to indicate that the primary mission of Soviet strategic attack forces remains the classical one of destroying the enemy's war-making capability...once deterrence had failed...the paramount concern of the Soviet military leadership would be on how to win the war, or at least with how to maximize the chances of the USSR's surviving it as a nation." Elsewhere, the Estimate notes that the military leaders clearly hope to be able to strike first if it came to a showdown though it expresses doubt about the willingness of the political leadership to go along.

The NIE drafters have considered official pronouncements on matters of national policy not as the equivalent of US campaign oratory, as the B Team suggests, but as forms of communication which often do indeed lay down the line the USSR intends to follow but are sometimes ritual reiterations of time-honored aspirations and ultimate goals. How seriously any particular pronouncement is to be taken, as with other intelligence information, is a matter for professional analysis and evaluation.

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